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Eric Fougère, *Les Îles malades: Léproseries et lazarets de Nouvelle-Calédonie, Guyane et Guadeloupe*. Paris: Garnier, 2018. 168 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €28.00 (pb). ISBN 9782406065043.

Review by Sophie Fuggle, Nottingham Trent University.

Over recent months, the global COVID-19 pandemic has invited numerous comparisons with historical pandemics from the Bubonic plague onwards. Looking to history cannot offer a template of how to live through this current moment nor is there much reassurance to be found in comparisons. Such references, at least in the mainstream media this reader has encountered, have focused on big data, death tolls and survival rates, or individual personal tragedy presented as cautionary tales. There has been far less enquiry into what parallels might be made with the highly racialised stakes of the pandemic and the questions of which lives we value and why. Yet there are valuable insights to be obtained from looking not simply at the effects of pandemics and epidemics across history but also how these were organised and managed.

Published in 2018, Eric Fougère's *Les Îles malades: Léproseries et lazarets de Nouvelle-Calédonie, Guyane et Guadeloupe* offers a series of case studies exploring the complex political stakes at different quarantine islands across the French empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are situated within a wider history of disease and containment that includes both the religious Judaeo-Christian symbolism constructed around the figure of the leper and the construction of the Ghetto in Venice in the sixteenth century, identified by Fougère as precursor to the Warsaw Ghetto and the Nazi camps. The book develops Fougère's extensive work on France's use of islands as sites of exile and containment, most notably explored in *Ile Prison: Bagne et déportation*.<sup>[1]</sup> French Guiana and New Caledonia constitute Fougère's primary focus, but attention is also given to Guadeloupe. All three sites used various islands as spaces of quarantine. What is significant and often overlooked about the use of islands as quarantine sites is how these span other distinct periods in French colonial history. In particular, the use of islands to contain and manage different diseases is integral to both the mass forced migrations of slavery and convict transportation. Looking at quarantine across this long period, it becomes clear how the treatment, containment, and exile associated with different diseases and epidemics reflect the shifting racial politics as well as different organisation of free and forced labour. Such politics include the issue of lost labour when a slave was found to have contracted leprosy. They also include the reversals that take place in French Guiana as the colony transitions from site of black slave labour to one of (predominantly) white convict labour. Indigenous populations across the empire are also subject to different forms of isolation and management. How, we might ask, can

these issues of labour and race be connected to today's pandemic, which continues to expose the structural racism of slavery and colonialism underpinning Western economics and policing?

Throughout the text, Fougère's scholarship is heavily indebted to the work of philosopher Michel Foucault both in terms of method and style. The book opens with the claim that: "Autant qu'un corps, il se peut que l'individu soit un espace" (p. 7). Like Foucault, Fougère relies heavily on a syntax intended to emphasize the parallels, oppositions and reversals that comprise different forms of isolation, containment and exile: "Soit l'exclusion bannit le malade hors d'un espace à purifier, soit l'inclusion procède en isolant le malade au sein d'un espace à contrôler" (p. 7). Foucault's brief comparison between the different approaches taken towards leprosy and the plague in *Surveiller et punir* are set out in the introduction as key to Fougère's own exploration of how such strategies are developed in the context of island geographies, spaces already defined as "discontinuous" and "fragmented" (p. 8).<sup>[2]</sup> However, elsewhere in the book, direct reference to Foucault is limited. This is no doubt because the examples and accounts of metropolitan prisons and other disciplinary institutions that form the basis of Foucault's conceptions of discipline are not Fougère's examples. To apply Foucault's method to different contexts and locations leads Fougère to his own conclusions and conceptions about space. To simply reiterate the claims of *Surveiller et punir*, conclusions drawn from another set of geographies would, one imagines, constitute a betrayal of that very method. In this respect, Fougère implicitly redresses some of the criticisms made against Foucault for bracketing out discussion of penal colonies in his discussion of punishment. As such *Îles malades* (together with the earlier *Île-prison*) seems to take up the challenge set by Ann Laura Stoler in her call to reconfigure Foucault's metaphoric allusion to the "carceral archipelago" as "carceral archipelago of empire": "Thinking with a carceral archipelago of empire does more than extend the geographic scope of Foucault's analysis. If a key issue is to identify the conditions 'that have made [certain] practices possible and to establish the grounds on which they depend for their intelligibility,' then an imperial vantage point would extend Foucault's carceral continuum to new political and analytic space and, not least, to a conceptual matrix in which a politics of security has figured centrally in the policing of imperial borderlands and ambiguous frontiers."<sup>[3]</sup>

Of key importance to Fougère's own thinking on space are Foucault's 1977-78 Collège de France lectures *Sécurité, population, territoire* in which concepts of circulation and growth are juxtaposed with earlier notions of isolation and containment.<sup>[4]</sup> Foucault describes these as "security," offering a set of definitions that sit uneasily with established uses of the term, which align it with policing and the setting of limits. It is perhaps the risk of confusion that has deterred many scholars working in the emerging sub-field of carceral geography from engaging with Foucault's lecture series despite the significant clarifications and potential it offers for thinking about the carceral beyond the limits of the prison cell. Without evoking the term security directly, Fougère nevertheless draws on Foucault's identification of practices that are "centrifugal" to describe the approaches that emerged across the vast spaces of empire to deal with contagion (p. 103). Where the treatment of leprosy required exile away from population centres, diseases such as cholera and yellow fever spread via a rapidly growing maritime trade required the creation of quarantines at the shortest possible distance from the ports (p. 114).

The story Fougère tells of the quarantine island is one which relies almost exclusively on the official archives of the colonial administration. This is something Fougère himself seems highly aware of, notably when he affirms the inevitable gaps between "intentions stratégiques" and "réalisations pratiques" (p. 26). Of course, such archives can be read against themselves in order

to expose the internal tensions and hypocrisies of the colonial machine. And, indeed, it is here that we can trace earlier manifestations of the structural racism that continues to shape contemporary society. Other sources are nevertheless in short supply. Colonial doctors such as Léon Collin who spent time in both French Guiana and New Caledonia offer useful supplementary accounts in their memoirs of the treatment and management of patients.[5] However, beyond accounts of crimes committed by liberated convicts quarantined for leprosy, what is largely missing from Fougère's study are the voices and experiences of the patients themselves. These missing voices belong to what Patrick Chamoiseau has referred to as the *traces-mémoires* of the penal colony.[6] These are the voices that are not simply lost but obscured by louder, more privileged voices such as Henri Charrière and René Belbenoit, whose memoirs annex the leper colony to a salacious anecdote.[7] In Charrière's *Papillon*, the abject figure of the convict disfigured by leprosy is left to die on Îlot Saint Louis providing yet one more foil to Charrière's own heroic exceptionalism.

Thus, while Fougère's study is painstaking in its selection and use of archives, it is far from an exhaustive study of quarantine. What emerges is a starting point for future studies into this under researched area of French colonial history situated within a global history of disease management. Moreover, it is in the gaps between official strategies and regulations issued from mainland France and the specific practices undertaken within unique island spaces that Fougère locates the focus of his study: "C'est de ces décalages, à la fois temporels et spatiaux mais aussi climiques (entre lèpre et peste, entre action législative ou règlements d'administration et réalités de terrain), qu'il doit être question si l'on veut faire, à présent, la géo-histoire d'une bio-histoire insulaire" (p. 27).

As we struggle to make sense of the current pandemic and the ongoing systemic racial and economic inequalities rendered increasingly visible by the pressures of lockdowns imposed across the globe, we might follow Fougère's advice and turn our attention towards the lags and gaps between official discourse and local practices.

## NOTES

[1] Eric Fougère, *Île-prison: Bagne et déportation* (Paris: Harmattan, 2002).

[2] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

[3] Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 108.

[4] Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2004).

[5] Léon Collin, *Des hommes et des bagnes* (Paris: Libertalia, 2015).

[6] Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi, *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne* (Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1994).

[7] Henri Charrière, *Papillon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); René Belbenoit, *Guillotine Sèche* (Paris: Manufacture des Livres, 2012).

Sophie Fuggle  
Nottingham Trent University  
[sophie.fuggle@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:sophie.fuggle@ntu.ac.uk)

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